

SOCIAL ACTION



ENDURING BASES OF CHRISTIAN ACTION

by John C. Bennett

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NOBLE S. ELDERKIN, *Chairman*

DWIGHT J. BRADLEY, *Director*

ELIZABETH G. WHITING, *Associate Director and Editor*

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Our cover this month: Michelangelo, Vault of Sistine Chapel, Vatican, The Prophet Isaiah. Photograph by Anderson; Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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PROPHETS! Prophets in our pulpits as well as prophets in our pews! Not *fore*-tellers of the future but *forth*-tellers of the will of God. We stand in need of such prophets—men and women with insight into what God desires for human society today, not lacking in courage to speak and live it out.

Some such we already have, scattered up and down the country, in rural parishes, in town churches surrounded by green lawns, in the slum quarters of many a city, and even, by a miracle of God, in the wealthy suburbs. But they are not enough. If we have six thousand churches, we need six thousand prophets behind the pulpit Bibles, and a hundred times six thousand in front of them. Under such influence the land might awaken to the faith to which we witness. Then we might become a "nation under God" indeed.

But prophecy is the most difficult of the arts, for the prophet has to believe in God. He needs to believe completely, as a drowning man believes in air. The prophet's very will to live, fierce as it may be, must lag a little behind his will to obey the voice of God. Jeremiah called it a "fire in the bones." So it must be to anyone who by life and word seeks to "forth-tell" to his generation what God wants to have done for humanity.

When it is God, the hidden governor of the universe, who animates the preacher, how pervasively the quality of humility fills the discourse! For who will appoint himself spokesman for Omniscience? The egotist will. The man who has to compensate psychologically for some dimly felt deficiency may do so. But the man who knows that he stands at the boundary between time and eternity and must put the long thoughts of heaven into little phrases; who must straight-jacket with words the maker of Pleiades or cup the measureless tragedy of Christ in a half-hour homily—that man must shudder at his own folly while he speaks. Yet if the thoughts he brings before the people are true thoughts, each one will bear its own "Thus saith the Lord."

In content of thought the Christian of today, as of every day, must reflect the sobering presupposition that he is neither iden-

tified with nor separated from God. He has never seen the blueprint for the perfect human society which some imagine is lying on the desk of the Almighty. He is not certain about the politics of the Most High. He is not clear as to where the Arbiter of Nations desires to have the boundary line drawn between, say, Germany and Poland. The prophet must needs remain cool to all Utopian notions, and guard himself against commitment to purely relative projects and methods. But the danger here is that he will go to the opposite extreme and lower his thought to the level of the innocuous and to a temperature that is neither hot nor cold. His best truths are then likely to become hypotheses, his certainties probabilities.

The content which on the one hand is neither a far-off nothing of vague principle nor on the other a program so concrete as to be indistinguishable from politics and lacking the *elan* of eternity, is the "middle axiom" of which the social philosophers speak. For example, if the idea of the brotherhood of man is a general principle, and the United Nations a political proposal, the middle axiom in this field is that the Christian must devote all that he is and has to the establishment of definite political unity among men. Affirmation of such a proposition does not lead to the wrong kind of political involvement, but while denial of it is a repudiation of the Gospel, it is in this area that the prophet discovers himself.

It is for this reason that the following pages by John Bennett are of such importance: They furnish the social prophet with structural materials for his thought. A better discipline for a modern minister could hardly be conceived than the virtual memorization of the propositions set forth by Dr. Bennett. With these in his head, a prophet will speak without arrogance but with authority.

DOUGLAS HORTON

ENDURING BASES OF CHRISTIAN ACTION

BY JOHN C. BENNETT

Every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man, a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. Matthew 13:52.

THINGS NEW AND OLD

Social Action as an emphasis within the Christian Church is both new and old. It is old because it is rooted in the teachings of the prophets of Israel. It is old because it grows inevitably out of the teachings of Jesus which express God's concern for the victims of social institutions and which relentlessly criticize forms of special privilege. It is old because in many periods the Church has recognized its responsibility for the social order. In such different situations as Medieval Christendom and the New England theocracy, Christianity was characterized by what Arthur Holt called "public mindedness." It is old because frequently in Christian history sects have arisen which emphasized a radical social message and, from time to time, the Church itself has been challenged by those within it who have appealed to its conscience in behalf of exploited humanity. American Christians will find one of the noblest of these Christian appeals to conscience in the Journal of John Woolman who, in the eighteenth century, carried his testimony against slavery and war, against the exploitation of the Indians and against the pretensions of wealth throughout the Middle Atlantic colonies.

But the emphasis upon social action in the contemporary

Church is also in some respects new. It represents a profound change in the understanding of Christian social responsibility. It came after a long period in which most Protestant Christianity had become controlled by a very individualistic conception of the gospel and in which the Church, both Protestant and Catholic, had come to give its uncritical support to the dominant political and economic powers in Europe and America. For about two generations this change in the attitudes of Christians toward society has developed. The early landmarks of this change that can be noted here are the work of such Americans as Washington Gladden and Bishop Potter; the writings of Charles Kingsley and Frederick Denison Maurice in England; the new sense of solidarity with the poor in the slums of London and other industrial centers in England that characterized the labors of many Anglo-Catholic priests in the second half of the nineteenth century and the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII. These were but the beginnings, and now the emphasis upon social action has become a part of the life and teaching of most branches of the Christian Church. What in America has been called "The Social Gospel" is but one form of this almost universal tendency. Roman Catholicism, especially in those countries where that Church has no religious monopoly and where it is not tempted to social conservatism by close association with an old feudal order, has come to emphasize a drastic form of social action for which support is found in the encyclicals of both Leo XIII and Pius XI. The Churches of Great Britain represent the same tendency; the greatest leader of it anywhere is the present Archbishop of Canterbury.

On the continent of Europe the Churches have in recent years come to embody a form of social action which has been made necessary for them by the fact that they have discovered that there can be no compromise between the Church of Christ and totalitarian tyranny. Observers of European Christianity, who in the past have been impressed by the religious quietism and social conservatism of many of the Churches on that continent

are now calling attention to the heroic "activism" of Christians in Europe and to their resistance to tyranny, not merely in the interests of the Church, but also in the interests of human freedom and especially in behalf of the persecuted Jews. The younger Christian Churches on the mission field have long seen the importance of Christian social action and one of the finest statements of what it involves is to be found in the report of the Madras Conference which was primarily a gathering of representatives of those younger Churches.

One of my reasons for writing this article is to show the essential falsity of the common idea that the prevailing trends in recent Christian Theology cut the nerve of social action. That there has been a good deal of re-thinking of the basis and methods of social action because of the influence of this Theology is true. Such a title as "The Social Gospel Re-examined" (book by F. Ernest Johnson) is typical of our situation. Sometimes there is a tendency to discard the label "Social Gospel" because it represents a particular combination of ideas that is now in some respects dated. But the central imperatives which lead to social action have not been endangered by recent Theology when the latter is understood. Indeed it can be said that the great Conference on Life and Work which was held at Oxford in 1937 represents a fresh synthesis of Theology and social action and, more than any other Christian conference in history, has made social action integral to the whole life and thought of the Church throughout the world.

In what follows I shall first explain what I mean when I say that social action is new, and in doing that I shall show why I believe that the new aspects of social action represent what should be permanent Christian emphases. I shall then turn to some of the criticisms that have been leveled against the social teaching of the Church from the point of view of recent theology and will suggest ways in which the basis and the methods of social action should be understood in the light of those criticisms.

*New wine must be put into new bottles;
and both are preserved. Luke 5:38.*

NEW BUT LASTING VALUES IN SOCIAL ACTION

*He judged the cause of the poor and the
needy; then it was well with him. Was
not this to know me? saith the Lord.
Jeremiah 22:16.*

1. *The first of these elements is the relative place that responsibility for the character of social institutions has in the lives of Christians and in the work of the Church.*

This is a matter of emphasis only but it is not less important for that reason. There are many reasons for this new emphasis, some of which will be clearer as the discussion proceeds. It is enough to mention here the following:

(1) Staggering human problems have been created by modern industrialism and they have been accompanied by increasing awareness of what is happening to people in all classes.

(2) The very great simplification of the whole Christian system of life and thought that has come as the result of scientific criticism and of the great emphasis upon the ethical judgment of particular doctrines has prepared the way for the emphasis upon social action. This simplification has been characteristic in varying degrees of all types of Christianity. The rediscovery of the Old Testament prophets and of the teachings of Jesus has done a great deal to encourage this emphasis.

(3) The great decrease in other-worldliness, not only in matters of doctrine but also in the assumptions that underlie the daily living of most Christians, has made it natural to give more attention to the solution of concrete problems in the world.

(4) The development of democracy has in many countries made clear that Christians are a large part of the public that is responsible for social decisions and so, to preserve their integrity as Christians, they must act under the guidance of the Christian conscience in public life.

(5) The tempo of modern life is such that change is to be expected in all areas and so the use of religion to support a providentially ordained *status quo* is obviously mistaken.

(6) The rise of radical movements has called attention to the evils from which the exploited majority of the human race has suffered and it has put the Church on its mettle. The very fact that these radical movements have often been anti-clerical and even anti-religious has in some countries forced the Church in self-defense to face the issue of social justice.

(7) The scientific study of society and the massive effect of social conditions on persons, obvious to anyone of intelligence, now make it clear that the human soul is moulded for good or evil by the social environment. We may make great room for human freedom in mastering unfavorable external conditions and still admit that children in their early years are in large part moulded by just such external conditions. In fact we may say that the great interest that our generation has shown in the concrete problems of child life is an extremely important source of the new emphasis upon responsibility for the changing of social institutions. All individualistic ideas of society which leave the fate of families to the merit or the demerit of the wage-earning member of the family have broken down, partly because we see that even merit can be completely overborne by such a catastrophic social factor as an economic depression, and partly because, even in favorable times, it is wrong to make the children of a family suffer extreme want because of the faults of the father. Archbishop Temple has given effective expression to this modern tendency to judge institutions by their effect upon children. He says of the malnutrition that results from poverty and ignorance: "Children are the most obvious

sufferers, but those who have suffered in this way as children seldom come later to full strength or to physical and spiritual stability." *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 11.

These factors have together led to such a strong emphasis upon the social responsibility of Christians and of the Church in many circles that we can say that more than ever before an essential test of the spiritual life of a Church is the sensitivity of its social conscience. Where Churches are callous and complacent about the problems of economic justice and racial discrimination, we can rightly say of them that no degree of piety, no profundity in theology and no effectiveness in the cure of individual souls can make up for this social blindness.

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25:40.

2. *A second characteristic of the modern movement for Christian Social Action is that those who are influenced by it try to see the world from the point of view of the most exploited classes and races.*

There have been sectarian movements that have represented a similar criticism of society from the point of view of exploited groups but this has not been the case with great Churches since the earliest Christian centuries. Medieval Social Christianity was a source of ethical guidance and control but it was not a source of revolutionary criticism. Even in America there has been a long record of distrust of such popular movements as those led by Jefferson, Jackson and Bryan, on the part of leaders of the Churches. There is a marked difference in their attitude now toward the popular impulse behind the New Deal. The tendency in the past has been to give the benefit of the doubt to the rich and the respectable. It is much sounder for a Christian Church to give the benefit of the doubt to the poor and the weak. As Walter Rauschenbusch once put it: "The strong have

ample means of defending their just interests and usually enough power left to guard their unjust interests too." (*Christianity and the Social Crisis*, p. 361) This does not mean uncritical support of the aims of any group but it is important to be distrustful of those who already have exclusive privileges and who seek to maintain them.

Christians should know that it is premature to form a judgment of any social system until they have listened to the people at the bottom of it. This was seen very clearly by Abraham Lincoln. He writes about a certain Dr. Ross, a minister who owned a slave named Sambo. Dr. Ross wrestled with the question: "Is it the will of God that Sambo shall remain a slave, or be set free?" Lincoln mentions the considerations which influence Dr. Ross's decision and points out that there is one source to which he never goes for light on the problem. He never thinks of asking Sambo's opinion of it. (Stern, *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 498). That has been precisely the difficulty in the whole history of the Church as a powerful institution in society. We now know that we must ask Sambo. At this point we are helped by the fact that Sambo, as a symbol for the exploited people around the world, usually tells us before we ask! We can be thankful for that. On it rests one of the great hopes of our time.

Openness to the needs and aspirations of those who have least power has led many Churchmen, especially Protestant Churchmen, to take a sympathetic attitude toward Socialism. There have been many organizations that have been devoted to the promotion of some kind of Christian Socialism. The most vigorous of these organizations at present is the Fellowship of Socialist Christians of which Reinhold Niebuhr is the Chairman. As I have received a letter from a Congregational layman attacking the Council for Social Action and citing some statements of Professor Niebuhr in which he criticized the "Social Gospel," I want to point out that, while Reinhold Niebuhr is one of those who have forced Christians to rethink the theological

context of what we have called the "Social Gospel," he is as emphatic as ever in his conviction that Christianity demands that we seek a radical change of our economic institutions in the direction of Socialism. It is interesting to observe that the two greatest American leaders of Christian social thought, Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr, have both been Christian Socialists.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom I have referred as the outstanding leader of Christian social thought on a world scale, might not call himself a Socialist but he is working for a mixed type of economy which would in many of its aspects be Socialistic. Moreover, he was a member of the Labor Party until he first became a Bishop, when he resigned, not because he had changed his views but because he felt that he should not as Bishop be involved in partisan politics. He was for many years the President of the Workers Educational Association which identified him closely with the aspirations of British Labor. In addition to the organizations which have definitely favored some form of socialism there have been and are many other movements within the Churches which represent a radical criticism of the institutions of Capitalism. This is true of such organizations as the Methodist Federation for Social Service, the Church League for Industrial Democracy in the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action, to mention only a few now in existence. Most Catholic and Protestant thinkers of great international influence are drastic in their criticism of contemporary Capitalism in both its individualistic and its monopolistic forms. There is difference of opinion, however, as to the means of solving the problem. Many would go far in the advocacy of social ownership of the means of production, but would seek to guard against the utopianism of secular Socialist or Communist movements which often have assumed that Socialism or Communism could be both a religion and an economic program and that it offered the key to the solution of all human problems. The rejection of that kind of utopianism is now almost universal among Christian thinkers.

Representatives of the emphasis upon social action in all the Churches, Catholic and Protestant, have identified themselves with the Labor Movement in a special way. This is an example of the tendency to be open to the needs and aspirations of those who have least power. Objection may now be raised that organized labor no longer could be said to have least power! I will come to that question soon. Whatever we may say about it, there can be no doubt that in the past two generations it was right for Christian groups and for Churches to stress the necessity of effective labor organizations. In 1907 Walter Rauschenbusch wrote about the basic sympathy for labor which he believed a Christian should share. He said:

A man's sympathy is a more decisive fact in his activity than his judgment. One man today may disapprove of a given action of a railway or of a coal-combine, but his instinctive sympathy is always with 'property' and the 'vested interests.' Another man may lament and condemn a foolish strike or headlong violence, but he will dwell on the extenuating circumstances and hold to the fundamental justice of the 'cause of labor.' This division of sympathy is now coming to be the real line of cleavage in our public affairs. There is no question on which side the sympathy of the prophets was enlisted. (*Christianity and the Social Crisis*, p. 12)

It is in the spirit of those words that the leaders of both Protestantism and Catholicism and the official agencies of many Churches have emphasized the relation between the Churches and Labor. The struggle for the improvement of the status of Labor and for the development of Labor Unions with effective bargaining power was and is for them a struggle for essential justice. And struggle it has been with the odds against Labor until very recent years.

What are we to say now that Labor has gained great power? What began as openness to the aspirations of those who had least power has come to seem to many to be favoritism toward one powerful group as against others. I think that those who represent the Churches should take account of the change in the situation but that they should not do this in such fashion

as to encourage those who now engage in a "smearing campaign" against Labor in order to encourage the nation to cancel the gains of Labor. It is of the utmost importance that those who have had the attitude toward Labor that Rauschenbusch expressed encourage the movements of Labor to be self-critical and to accept the responsibility that should go with power. Moreover, it is important to see the world from the point of view of other groups—of tenant farmers and occupying farm owners, of Negroes who are often excluded from Labor Unions and of middle-class people who are also workers. Exclusive concentration on industrial workers has created a one-sidedness that must be corrected. Few people have seen this fact more clearly than Arthur Holt, the founder of the Council for Social Action. But there is all the difference in the world between the present wave of Labor-baiting, on the part of people who have always enjoyed more privileges than Labor has yet won for itself, and the kind of understanding criticism of Labor that begins by emphasizing that the new status won by this third of our population is a cornerstone of social justice.

The gains of Labor are still in a precarious state. Political developments in the near future might lead to the repeal of the legislation on which these gains depend or might sabotage that legislation by putting its enforcement into the hands of the enemies of labor. If the nation is allowed to drift into another long continued depression these gains may be largely swept away. Concern for the future status of Labor is still an essential application of the principle that the Church should be open to the needs and aspirations of those who have least power and least security.

*He hath put down the mighty from their
seats, and exalted them of low degree.
Luke 1:52.*

3. *Modern Social Christianity has developed within a culture in which it is natural to expect rapid and fundamental change in the social structure.*

Christian thought about society has been crystallized in periods in which it was natural to expect the continuance, for an indefinite period, of the social system of the time. Paul's words about obedience to the powers that be as ordained of God (Rom. 13: 1-6) have until recent times greatly influenced Christian thought about social institutions. Ethical criticism of social institutions was less important than acceptance of them as the appointment of divine providence.

Today it is all different. We have no question about the radical character of the changes to be expected. We are not as sure as we were, even as recently as fifteen years ago, that the changes will be in the right direction. The rise of totalitarianism from the revolutionary ferment of our time has been a warning to those who took satisfaction in change as such. In principle, there is no real reason for being less fatalistic in a world in which one seems to be at the mercy of uncontrolled changes than there is in a world that seems static. But actually the combination of the radical demands made upon society and the expectation of change has had a very profound effect on our understanding of Christian social responsibility. It has brought about a loosening of ancient structures to which the Church has given a kind of sanctity. All the facades that have given a false majesty to special privilege have been discredited. Few things in our world could be less divine than the right of kings. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that the right of dictators rests upon force rather than upon moral prestige.

The kind of inhibition against revolution or resistance to authority, based upon theological considerations, which has been characteristic of both Catholics and Protestants (except for the successors of John Calvin), has gone. There may be great loss here if it means that men will more easily drift into anarchy, but it will be a gain if the holders of unjust power can less effectively claim divine sanction for their power. I doubt if it will be possible again to use Christianity as the support for an hierarchical society and to do this in part by in-

stilling in those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy the idea that they are there by divine appointment. How remote is the old jingle: "God bless the squire and his relations, and teach us all to keep our stations," which L. P. Jacks cites as characteristic of the English in 1860. (*Confessions of an Octogenarian*, p. 41) We have here an overwhelming change that makes the social teaching of the Churches in our time in some respects new.

*So we built the wall; and all the wall was
joined together unto the half thereof:
for the people had a mind to work.
Nehemiah 4:6.*

4. *Modern Social Christianity has been open to the contribution of the social sciences and has come to see the importance of those areas in which the expert and the social engineer are needed to supplement the work of the prophet and the priest.*

A file of the issues of *Social Action* during the years of its publication would quickly provide illustrations of the importance of this emphasis upon the social sciences. The work of the Council for Social Action and of many other agencies of the modern Church is based upon the assumption that social analysis must accompany religious motivation if social striving is not to be blind. Social research has become one activity of the Churches themselves. The Roman Catholic Church has far greater resources for such research than is the case with Protestantism. The Federal Council of Churches has, as one of its most important departments, the department of Education and Research. It has too small a staff but its work has had great influence through the years. The mission boards have come to rely upon social research more than the Churches at home. Many theological schools have made provision for both the teaching of Christian Social Ethics and the teaching of Sociology of a more descriptive sort in order to illumine the social situations to which the ethics must be applied.

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God? Micah 6:8.

5. *Modern Social Christianity has involved the tendency to re-examine both theology and religious living in the light of the emphasis upon social responsibility together with the increased awareness of the effect of social institutions upon persons.*

It is in this area that the greatest differences between the Catholic and Protestant forms of Social Christianity have existed. Also, it is in this area that the current rethinking of the theological context of social action has gone forward. I shall defer my discussion of the current rethinking of these problems until the next section of this article. Here I shall mention a few very pervasive developments which are likely to have permanent influence.

There has been a widespread tendency to criticize a too "spiritual" interpretation of Christianity. It has been well said that "Christianity is the most materialistic of all great religions." (William Temple: *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, p. 88) It is not ashamed of the body. A new emphasis upon the roots of Christianity in the Old Testament has helped to underline this side of our faith. Too sharp a separation between matter and spirit has been an inheritance from Greek thought that is alien to the spirit of the Bible. The close inter-relation between the soul and the body and between the total individual personality and the environment has given a spiritual significance to the effort to raise the level of bodily health or to establish external conditions which favor the growth of the person. Indeed it should be said over and over again that justice which is a spiritual good may often be embodied in the distribution of bread. Berdyaev, the Russian Orthodox thinker, has said, "Bread for myself is a material question; bread for my neighbor is a spirit-

ual question." Catholics of various types have been able to give an emphasis to the material basis of life because, in the Mass, the elements of bread and wine are material and yet they become the vehicles of the life of the spirit. The Mass becomes for many sensitive Catholics a kind of acted parable of the close relation between the material and the spiritual.

There has been a re-examination of the content of sin. Walter Rauschenbusch in his *A Theology for the Social Gospel* has made a permanent contribution to our thinking by his emphasis upon the social aspects of sin. He says: "Sin is not a private transaction between the sinner and God. Humanity always crowds the audience room where God holds court." There may seem to be some difference between his view of sin which stresses the element of selfishness in relation to men and the view of such a thinker as Reinhold Niebuhr who sees in pride before God the typical sin. But Niebuhr in all of his writings shows that pride before God is in fact the root of the most anti-social forms of selfishness, and his pages are as much packed with illustrations of the social aspects of sin as is the case with Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch's greatest contribution to our thought in this connection is his conception of "The Kingdom of Evil." He saw how far it is true that human evil becomes entrenched in social institutions and social habits. Each generation inherits the cumulative effects of the wrong decisions of its predecessors in foreign policies, in the industrial system and in the patterns of racial discrimination. It is extremely difficult to make a fresh start.

One of the most influential contemporary thinkers who might be contrasted with Walter Rauschenbusch, Paul Tillich, has developed a very similar conception of what he calls the "Demonic" in history. The Demonic is not to be confused with the idea of personal spirits but rather with tendencies that are embodied in human institutions. The chief contemporary examples of the Demonic which he emphasizes are Capitalism as an economic system that sets itself up as "autonomous" or as independent of ethical and religious criticism, and Nationalism

which is another example of the setting up of a human system above moral and religious criticism. He also says in words which could be taken as a charter for Christian Social Action:

While the Christian Churches in the Catholic period dealt with the salvation of individuals and with the salvation of groups and institutions only with respect to the church itself, and in Protestantism the salvation of groups and institutions is neglected altogether, the post-Protestant period of Christianity probably will deal predominantly with the ultimate meaning and the salvation of groups and institutions. (*The Kingdom of God in History*—Oxford Conference Volume—p. 121)

Along with the rethinking of theology has gone a revision of Christian religious living as shown in the worship of the Church. The hymn books have come to include many hymns which deal with the social responsibilities of the Christian. Christian education—and not only the ultra-progressive types of religious education—has done much to integrate the personal religious development of the individual with the discovery of social needs and with commitment to the task of realizing greater justice and fraternity in the relations between social groups. Group repentance and personal repentance, because of one's involvement in social sin, have become an important part of both private and public prayer. I have often referred to Walter Rauschenbusch in this discussion but nothing that he did has had more influence than his little book, *Prayers of the Social Awakening*. Throughout America the prayers in our non-liturgical Churches have been different because of the influence of that collection of prayers. The liturgical Churches have done much to bring the repentance for social sin and the sense of social responsibility into the services of the Church. One of the best examples of this tendency is a little book which is a semi-official supplement to the Anglican Prayer Book entitled *The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*. Both the Anglo-Catholics and the Roman Catholics have done a great deal to bring out the social implications of the liturgies of the Church. This has been a special concern of the Benedictine Order in the Roman Church.

THESE five aspects of modern Social Christianity are in some respects new. In combination they represent a unique emphasis in the history of the Church, an emphasis which is necessary if we, in our situation, are to be true to what we can learn of God's will from the prophets of Israel and from the teachings of Jesus. The question is often asked: Why is this emphasis lacking in the New Testament? I think that some of these aspects of Social Christianity are to be found in the New Testament but it is true that the combination of them is not to be found there in the form in which many contemporary Christians now accept them. The concern for the people at the bottom of society is there. Jesus did consider the economic needs of Lazarus and, in the story of the Last Judgment, he stressed the need of "even these least," the anonymous victims of society as having a major claim upon all who would follow him. He deeply distrusted wealth as a source of corruption for those who possessed it. He was interested in those marginal people in society who were the victims of the religious self-righteousness of the respectable classes. No one could have taken a more revolutionary attitude toward a form of oppression than Jesus did in his attack upon the Pharisees who embodied the tendency to subordinate the needs of persons to religious vested interests. Moreover, Jesus did announce the coming of the Kingdom of God as the center of his message. Modern scholars debate at length concerning the meaning of the Kingdom, but *it can be said with confidence that, whatever Jesus may have taught about the consummation of the Kingdom of God, he did stress the rule of God now in all aspects of human life as the meaning of the Kingdom for those who are living in the world as it is.*

There are important differences between our age and the age of Jesus which make it necessary to see our responsibilities in a new light, from a point of view that was not possible in the first century. These differences are as follows: (1) We think in terms of an indefinite future whereas Jesus and his contemporaries believed that the end of history was to come

soon. This meant for them that God by divine act would vindicate his righteousness once for all. We, on the contrary, have responsibility for long run social policies in history. (2) We live in a world in which large scale changes in the structure of society are inevitable. It is *possible* now to overcome poverty. It is *possible* now to think of organizing the world for peace. It is a commonplace that this is a revolutionary period and it is our responsibility to make decisions which will affect the course of the revolution for good or evil. If we allow things to drift we will have not revolution in the interests of all men but counter-revolution in the interests of new groups of privileged men who succeed in capturing power. (3) In a nation such as ours Christians and the Church can to a great extent influence the public opinion on which the right decisions will depend. Wherever there is free public opinion there are possibilities of Christian social action which did not exist in the first century. Those who would be disciples of Jesus in the twentieth century must take account of all three of these differences between his age and ours and implement his teaching in ways that fit our necessities.

I have referred several times to the changes in theology that have come over the minds of Christians in the past two decades. In the next part of this article I shall outline the positive contribution of these changes to our thinking about Christian social action. Here I desire to say with the utmost emphasis that these changes do not undercut the five aspects of Social Christianity which I have described. If one takes the great names associated with theology in our time, such names as Emil Brunner, Nicolai Berdyaev, Reinhold Niebuhr, William Temple, Paul Tillich and Jacques Maritain, one finds that every one of them gives adequate place to all five aspects of Social Christianity. If we ask about the most dynamic figure of all, Karl Barth, we discover that even he has come within the past five years to represent Christian social action in his own way. If one is to take the great Christian documents of our time from the encyclicals of the Pope to the reports of the most rep-

representative conferences of the non-Roman Churches we find the same thing to be true. If we take the assumptions that underlie the chief institutions of the modern Church which have been influenced by theological developments, such institutions as The World Council of Churches, it is still true.

There has just come to this country a document that summarizes the attitudes of Churches on all continents to the problems of world reconstruction. There runs through it all a clear recognition of the social responsibility of Christians and Churches and this social responsibility, even in the case of the more conservative Churches, is related to the necessity of changing the institutions of society. It says in words that might be commonplace if spoken in New York but which show a marked gain, coming from the heart of the European continent: "In the stress and storm of recent years the churches have come to realize far more clearly than they did during the last centuries that it is part of their divine mission to announce the Will and Purpose of God concerning the common life of men, including the relationships of nations to each other."

*Look unto the rock whence ye were
hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence
ye were digged. Isaiah 51:1.*

DEEPER INSIGHTS FOR SOCIAL ACTION

Every one of the five contributions of modern Social Christianity that I have outlined must be retained, but they should be put into a total context of thought quite different from that with which they seemed to fit before 1914. Perhaps in America the decisive date would be 1929, for it was the depression and then the succession of horrors following the rise of National Socialism that really convinced Christians in America of their miscalculation concerning the depth and stubbornness of evil in human history. The last two decades have been years of intensive religious thought concerning the meaning of events.

Theology has been rediscovered as an essential source of guidance for Christian action. I shall now summarize the most important insights which have come out of the religious ferment of our time, insights that have greatest importance for social action.

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. Luke 17: 20-21.

1. *Social action should be based upon the recognition that there is no over-all external solution of the human problem, that all utopian expectations are the beginning of disillusionment.*

This is not a counsel of despair. It need not be pessimistic except against the background of an exaggerated optimism. What needs to be emphasized is that every level of moral achievement finds its own forms of evil. Human selfishness and pride can corrupt the best institutions. In so far as this danger is realized and in so far as men in every situation remain humbled before God, who is beyond all human ideals and achievements, the worst results of selfishness and pride can be counteracted. The greatest danger of all is that men should say of any social order: "Now we have arrived; already we have the Kingdom of God here in our keeping." At the moment when men first say that, they are on the verge of the deepest corruption and the most cruel fanaticism.

Continued openness to God's judgment as transcending even our best is true to the actual situation and it is the chief source of social health. Such openness toward God's judgment upon our best is supported by a sense of sin that is kept relevant to social life. Reinhold Niebuhr has in a massive way illumined this aspect of our experience. He has shown with great vividness the ways in which men of privilege and power, wise men and saints, nations and classes, races and churches are all

tempted in specific ways to claim too much for their moral achievements, to defend their security or their self-respect at the expense of others and to use universal ideals as sanctions for partial interests. There is, he believes, in all of us a tendency to make ourselves the center of our own existence and even to go beyond that and to make ourselves the center of all existence. The latter suggestion may seem an exaggeration but we find that tendency among nations and dynamic individuals who never come to the end of their imperialistic designs. All who are interested in social action should do full justice to this side of Niebuhr's thought. For, with extraordinary acuteness, he exposes the pretensions and the facades in our selves and in our civilization and he points out the kind of pretensions and facades that are likely to develop in the next stage of civilization.

There is no reason to be discouraged by these warnings against false expectations. Again, it should be said that to be warned of the temptations that will accompany even our moral achievements is to go far in preventing those achievements from being, in any central way, corrupted. It is not necessary to suppose that there is any problem that cannot to a large extent be solved. But it will not automatically *stay* solved. We can make progress in overcoming poverty and war, tyranny and racial discrimination. Reinhold Niebuhr says constantly that there are no limits to be set in advance to the possibilities of progress in those areas. Such progress, however, is never more than an approximation of God's will for man and no advance takes us beyond the danger of slipping back.

I believe that one way in which we can take both these hopes and these warnings is to say that to each generation there come moments of decision when new possibilities of both good and evil are present. It is the responsibility of each generation to prepare itself to make the right decision with hope.

As for our own time, the economic interdependence of all nations and the vulnerability of the most remote nation to

military attack have destroyed the possibility of isolationist evasions and have confronted the whole world with the demand that it organize for peace. The new power of the colored races has become a support for the sense of justice that seeks to overcome racial discrimination and, here, we shall either decide to work for interracial fraternity or allow ourselves to drift into deadly conflict between races. The threat of post-war unemployment and the disintegration of democratic life that large-scale unemployment would inevitably create, bring us up against another decision. We will either plan in a democratic way for full employment or we will drift into a situation in which some new totalitarian plan will be imposed on us. These are concrete illustrations of the kind of decisions which our generation faces, but they are more than that. In each case they suggest that there are external developments which are on the side of a right decision. The demands of justice and the evident necessities of our civilization, if it is to avoid complete disaster, point to the same decisions. There is thus reason enough for hope, though we must guard ourselves against the kind of optimism that expects too much of panaceas and that leaves us unprepared to meet the new temptations that will follow even a right decision.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9.

2. *Christian social action should proceed on the principle that Christianity cannot be identified fully with particular political and economic programs.*

There are at least three considerations which point to this conclusion.

(1) Most highly developed programs of action involve technical issues and precarious judgments concerning the way in which people will act in a new situation. In neither of these

cases is there specifically Christian guidance. It should be granted that often these difficulties are used as smoke screens to prevent action but, when full allowance for such deliberate obscurantism is made, it is still impossible to say that there is one Christian solution of our tangled social problems.

(2) Any movement that is promoting a political or economic program, a political party, for example, represents a great mixture of human motives. The closer it comes to power the more it attracts to itself those who seek to use it to gain power for themselves. It is therefore important for the Christian to realize that however loyal he may be to a particular movement it should be a secondary loyalty, kept under Christian criticism.

(3) In making choices among the major alternatives that are available to the Christian, he is forced, in many situations, to choose between evils. He thus discovers that there is a constant tension between Christian faith and the best choice that the Christian can make under most circumstances.

The history of the attitude of Christians toward war during the past twenty-five years indicates quite clearly the importance of this general principle. During the last war it seemed natural to most Christians to identify Christianity and the Church with the war effort of the nation. They soon regretted that they had done so. It then became apparent to many that they could identify Christianity and the Church with pacifism. But now it is evident that there are profound difficulties involved in that procedure. It leaves, without any solution, the problem confronting the nation when it must choose between armed resistance and surrender to a tyranny that is as defiling as it is oppressive when men collaborate with it. Individuals may continue to resist without violence but a great nation such as ours must make the choice between resistance by violence and some degree of collaboration. I think that many readers who are still pacifists, while they may not put the matter in quite the same

form, will admit that there is a problem here which makes it impossible to say that pacifism is the only Christian strategy. Christian wisdom today will either take the form of support of the cause of the United Nations with penitence and hope, and without hatred, or it will express itself in a personal pacifism which frankly admits that the problem remains still unsolved.

Though there may be no specific Christian program for detailed action there are definite Christian objectives which from time to time become clear. I mentioned some of these in discussing the decisions which our generation must make. These objectives today include: (1) the development of a world government to which must be delegated the power of final judgment in the controversies between nations; (2) the abolition of racial discrimination; (3) the maintenance of full employment and the provision of economic security for all; (4) the restoration or the development of political freedom and civil and religious liberties.

We can also affirm that there are programs which, in the light of these objectives, the Christian as a Christian and the Church as a Church should reject. One example would be a movement in this country toward isolationism after the war. Any movement that feeds on racial prejudice stands condemned by that fact. Likewise, movements which plainly reflect the impulse to return economic power to a small class, no matter how impressive their protestations of loyalty to democracy, should be opposed.

If we put together both the fact that there are certain clear Christian objectives and the fact that there are some programs and movements which are to be rejected as opposed to Christianity, we may come to one more conclusion. There are occasions when the only way of supporting a particular objective and of preventing some obviously unChristian movement from winning out is to give support to the only constructive program in the field. From time to time the issues are shaken down by

long debate and the course of events and we have to say "yes" or "no" to some constructive policy. I notice that various Church organizations in Great Britain recently gave their support to the Beveridge Plan in this way. The rejection of isolationism in America will doubtless take the form of support for some plan for world organization. Churches may well participate in the movement to abolish the poll tax, even though it is evident that regional considerations will make such an action divisive within the constituencies of some denominations.

Support of particular policies becomes difficult for the Church when these are a matter of partisan politics. One of my greatest fears is that the political party that has greatest strength in the Congregational Christian Churches may be the party of isolationism and reaction in 1944; in which case, because of long standing habits and the play of economic interests, the majority of the people in that denomination may find themselves supporting as citizens the very thing which when they speak through the Churches they oppose.

It is important to distinguish between the degrees to which the Churches may become identified with such programs. There is a difference, for example, between the resolutions of official Church bodies, the activities that are sponsored for the moment by official agencies, the statements that are made in sermons, the positions taken by ministers and Church officials as citizens and the stand of various unofficial groups of ministers and laymen who make their pronouncements as Churchmen. There is a wide range here in the extent to which the Church as such is committed. In general it would seem to be advisable, for those who in these various ways represent the Church, to take full account of the reasons for maintaining Christian reservations concerning particular programs; to make clear that, whatever they say or do, they believe that their words and actions should be kept under a Christian judgment which transcends even the best for which they plan; to affirm the freedom of the Christian conscience and the right to disagree; and then to speak

or act without serious inhibitions. When I find myself counseling emphasis upon Christian reservations, I am reminded of some words of R. H. Tawney: "When to speak is unpopular, it is less pardonable to be silent than to say too much."

Christian action, when all is said, is not most often action by Church bodies or words by preachers or pamphlets sponsored by agencies of the Church. Christian action is what the members of the Church do in their respective vocations in the world, what they do as citizens, as businessmen, as workers in factory or field, as moulders of public opinion. The Church's contribution toward Christian action can be measured ultimately by its total influence upon those who do the world's work. More important than any official support that the Churches may give to particular programs of any sort, is the kind of guidance it offers its members to purge themselves of the motives of narrow group or personal interest; to enable them to understand the world in which they must act; to develop in them an attitude of solidarity with those who are society's victims and to help them see, not only intellectually but with the vision that is kindled by worship and religious loyalty, the goals which are Christian. It is here that the work of the local Church is of supreme importance. What is said by great conferences and what is done by a few national agencies of the Church are without effect unless they become part of the teaching and activity in each local congregation.

***Come now, and let us reason together,
saith the Lord: though your sins be as
scarlet, they shall be white as snow;
though they be red like crimson, they
shall be as wool. Isaiah 1:18.***

3. *The emphasis upon social action should be put into the total context of Christian faith so that we can know in times of social frustration the forgiveness and the healing that come from God.*

If Social Christianity is limited to the preaching of God's

demand upon our consciences it may in some situations create a moral conflict that is too much for our spirits to endure. There are various tempting ways of reducing the conflict, and thus easing the spiritual tension, but they are a source of moral blindness. We can reduce the inner conflict by deceiving ourselves about what we actually do, by claiming too much for our accomplishment, or by becoming callous to the evil in which our lives are involved. In time of war we do in self-defense almost necessarily cultivate some measure of callousness. We can reduce the conflict by lowering our conception of what Christianity means. If we do this it is easy to engage in a "holy war" or to assume that there is no real tension between Christian faith and the policies we follow. In this way we become self-righteous and fanatical, judging everyone else in terms of our own social convictions. We can reduce the conflict by separating Christianity from the world of politics and from all use of power to secure justice. (It is often suggested, for example, that the Christian would do well to declare a moratorium on Christianity during the war.) We can reduce the conflict by evading the hardest issues and concentrating on the simpler problems about which we can do something with a minimum of moral frustration. But all these methods of reducing the conflict prevent us from facing the real situation in which we must act. Perhaps the separation of Christianity from the world of political action might pass as an exception to this rule, but even this has a fatal defect in that it robs us of the guidance, the power and the discipline of Christianity when we need them most. Yet, if he does not reduce the conflict by one of these methods, the sensitive Christian may be tempted to despair except in days of fair weather. There may be some robust souls who read these pages and feel that I am conjuring up a problem that has no actual existence. If this be true, I suspect that such readers have chosen one of those ways of reducing the conflict without realizing what they were doing.

The word "forgiveness" may not convey all that is meant by this aspect of Christian faith. It may suggest to many only the

problem which results from actual guilt in the legal sense. But much more than legal guilt is involved. The spirit of any one of us requires healing as well as stimulation and no more so than in the case of the frustration that accompanies the moral contrast between our social ideals and our actual achievements. But this healing should not be an escape from the tasks of life; it should be possible when we are in full view of all the facts. In time of war, the statesman, the soldier and the ordinary citizen, if they are Christians, all need to experience this side of God's influence—what has been called his mercy or his grace. If the pacifist is aware of all the complexities of the problem with which he is struggling in his own way, he will see how far he is responsible for the evil he does not resist—and he too will recognize the need of mercy. It is this side of the Christian faith that enables men to do "the next best thing" without deceiving themselves and without protecting themselves with an inner hardness or a false self-righteousness—without losing in war the qualities that will be needed in peace. It is far easier to "go all out" for one human cause or another and to lose mercy for one's enemies and opponents, and so to become unfit for a new situation in which that cause no longer meets the central need. But the Christian has a perspective that should prevent him from making that mistake and he can most surely preserve that perspective if he remembers that not only his enemies or opponents require forgiveness but that he also is in need of the divine mercy.

That he should also gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. John 11:52.

4. *The Church has come to have a new importance not only for what it can do in terms of direct social action but also because of the indirect effect of its life as a community that by its very nature is a guardian of human freedom and a bridge across many human divisions.*

The individual Christian would have difficulty in maintaining the Christian perspective while he is living through the crises of history if it were not for his membership in the Church. The worship of the Church and its continuous teaching should preserve wholeness in the individual, helping him to keep a balance between the demands of the moment and the guidance that comes from the Church's long experience. It is here that we can see the positive value in the conviction that, while we cannot separate the Church from its members and in some respects it is in the war, it should not be in the war in the same sense in which an individual Christian must be in the war. The Church should show what is at stake in the war from a Christian standpoint; but it must also transcend the national cause and the cause of the United Nations, keeping both the cause and the nations which are its instruments under criticism and bringing to the people the full Christian teaching undistorted by the passions of war. Because the Church includes both pacifists and non-pacifists, and is vividly aware of the Churches in the enemy nations as parts of the world Church, the American Church should be able to maintain this transcendence.

The Church can have an important indirect effect upon society also if it keeps within its fellowship people from all social groups. The racial and class stratification of American Churches is a great obstacle to their social effectiveness. All that is done to overcome that obstacle is indirect social action of the most valuable kind. In our time we have seen the Church go far in correcting its division into denominational and national units. These units still exist but each is conscious of membership in a larger Church. The fact that the Church actually crosses all national boundaries is one of the major resources on which humanity can draw in world reconstruction. All that is done to strengthen the loyalty of Churches in each nation to the larger Church that crosses the lines of battle, and all that will be done after the war to renew the ties between Christians who are now enemies, will be an indispensable contribution to the development of a new political order in the world.

The Church can have an important indirect effect upon the institutions of society by virtue of its claim to freedom from the state. Inevitably the state even in democratic nations will have increasing power to deal with the problems of a centralized and technological civilization, but that makes it essential for the state to be balanced by communities within the nation which by their very nature are responsible to God and not to the state. The Church is not the creature of the state. It must always strive to be free to speak in the name of God to the people of the nation. Except in the case of a totalitarian Church which believes in maintaining a religious monopoly, every blow struck for the freedom of the Church will be a blow for the freedom of all citizens.

Indirect social action should never be set over against direct social action. Both are necessary. I should include under direct social action not only action by official agencies of the Church but action by the members of the Church in response to the direct social teaching of the Church. If, out of cowardice or out of a misunderstanding of Christianity or out of subservience to the powerful, the Church evades responsibility for such direct action, it will become less fit to serve as a community pointing beyond all human divisions and all human powers to God. In fact it may descend so low that most of those who are striving for freedom and justice would rightly regard the institution of the Church as a betrayer. An essential condition for effective indirect social action is that the Church care so deeply about the fate of human beings that it will take direct action now.

When social action is separated from other functions of the Church and then regarded as its central purpose, the life of the Church is distorted and its social effectiveness is diminished. Such action should grow out of a deep personal Christian commitment, out of faith and worship. Conversion is necessary, conversion that changes the motives by which men live in all areas of their lives. The Church exists for the worship of God and it finds that human powers put themselves in the place of

God and that they must be resisted. The Church exists to bring the truth to men and it is its devotion to the truth that opens the door to human freedom for it is only a Church having something momentous to say because it is true that will resist the tyrants at great cost. The Church exists to bring power and healing, faith and love to individual persons everywhere, and it finds that those same persons are victims of economic exploitation, racial discrimination and war and that much of the responsibility for these conditions rests with its own members. It is in loyalty to these central purposes for which it exists that the Church discovers its social tasks.

BUILDING ON THE ENDURING BASES

BY DWIGHT J. BRADLEY

The Council for Social Action accepts the challenge laid down by John Bennett in the clear statement which you have just read. We have tried to keep our feet on solid ground. We have tried to have a lasting substance for our dreams.

Specifically, we have taken the lead in service to the victims of war. We have not tried to do it all; the whole denomination has joined in. But it fell to us to initiate the task assigned to Christians everywhere; of doing all we can to help the helpless in a time when human need has reached its climax of despair. This, above all others, is the Christian's calling: to plant a little beauty in the wilderness, to bring a little joy to broken hearts. Our Committee for War Victims commenced this work three years ago when the need was in its earlier beginnings and is still at it with redoubled vigor.

The Committee for War Victims enlarged the sphere of its activity when the defense program and then the war effort created human problems in camp communities and production areas. It became the Committee for War Victims and Services. Everyone pitched in and the response has been notable. Scores of churches offer hospitality and social life besides their essential religious services to the men from our armed forces and to the families of war workers. Money from the fund gathered by the Committee for War Victims and Services has made this possible.

We have brought forth and cultivated a nation-wide study of world order. We were not slow to realize that if the war is not to issue in another betrayal of human hope, our country must play a major part in guaranteeing not only military victory over the Axis but triumph over the forces of chaos and misrule after the war has ceased. We assembled a study packet through the expert labor of our Committee on International Relations. We called it, "American Churches and World Order." In it we placed material which asked the question, "What Kind of a World Do We Want?", with answers clear and prophetic. Another packet went out, called, "This Interdependent World." More than three thousand of the two are now in circulation.

We have done what we could to bring ideals of industrial democracy into the relationships between management and organized labor. We have always believed that a strong and socially mature labor movement is one of the chief assets of democratic nations. As the unions have grown strong, we have laid increased emphasis on the necessity for social maturity, both in their leadership and in the attitude of their rank and file.

We have tried to do our share in bringing back the country life of America to a level of happiness and opportunity. We have felt that we must support and work with all agencies, government and other, that are endeavoring to change this situation. Have we not stood upon enduring foundations in this task—foundations laid by the prophets of Israel who spoke for the

farmer and the tenant against the exploiter who for money ruined the countryside and all who eked out a living from its soil?

We have brought our influence to bear wherever rights of conscience have been challenged or ignored. This has made us quick to realize that the conscientious objector must be supported, not necessarily in his opinion but in his right to hold his opinion, against all infringement even in time of stress and strain. Here we seek to maintain our allegiance to the historic tradition of our Hebrew-Christian faith—in which from the days of the captivity in Babylon to the times of martyrdom in Rome, a great army of conscience-driven men and women kept laying the foundations of spiritual freedom for all the generations to come.

We have entered the field of intercultural relations, where conflict between rival groups threatens constantly to tear the fabric of social peace and to destroy the pattern of good order. Here we confront the problems created by differences of race, custom and creed. How may a democracy live in friendly goodwill within itself? How can minorities maintain their own particular attitudes and ways of living without infringing upon the rights of other minorities? How may Negroes and whites work out their relationships in such a way as to create constructive community life and encourage the growth of self-respect in every individual? How may the varied beliefs, loyalties, forms of worship and of social expression be integrated in a single body of national cohesion—and ultimately in a single body of cohesion the world around?

We have found a crying opportunity to help in this regard through our effort to serve the people of Japanese extraction in our country who were uprooted and moved into Assembly Centers and later into Relocation Camps. The Council for Social Action was given the task of leading in this effort, but not alone; for the American Board had a group of returned missionaries to Japan who were available for the work and these

were soon engaged in carrying on their missionary vocation here in America where people who themselves or whose parents came from Japan needed friendship and assistance. Have we not in this respect carried out the historic Hebrew-Christian tradition? The tradition of mercy that goes beyond justice and of kindness that cancels out the hard requirements of stern judgment and of punitive law?

The Council for Social Action has not neglected the field in which law and justice play their part in national life. Through a Committee on Legislation we keep in touch with trends in Congress and seek to strengthen or alter these trends, as the case may be, in the direction of humaneness and public welfare. We have taken part in the movement to abolish the Poll Tax. We have supported all movements in both Houses of Congress looking toward the fullest participation of our country in United Nations efforts to achieve a peace of which mankind may be proud and for which the generations to come may be thankful. We have stood back of those who still strive to maintain the democratic outlook upon the farm problem. We have associated ourselves with efforts to halt the breakdown of child labor standards. We have joined in the movement to continue the Reciprocal Trade Agreement policy. In all these things we have seen an underlying principle: namely, that of justice tempered by mercy—a principle embedded in the very soul of our religious faith.

In the magazine, SOCIAL ACTION, we are putting forth our supreme effort to help inform and guide opinion on matters of chief importance to our nation and our world. This magazine is being more and more widely read. Its articles have furnished subject matter for editorials in the daily press all over the country and even in England. Organizations of all kinds send in orders for this or that issue in large quantity. We hope that the members of our churches will take and read SOCIAL ACTION as part of their regular practice both as Christians and as citizens. How ancient is the tradition of writing and

reading about great issues, among those who have followed the Hebrew-Christian faith. The very term "scripture" makes this clear. From the sacred scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to the carefully preserved writings of those who formed the early Church, down through the generations and the centuries, there has been assembled a body of literature to which succeeding generations and centuries may turn for insight and for direction toward the right pathway ahead. The Council for Social Action submits its magazine to the criticism or approval of all who stand in this line. Was Reinhold Niebuhr accurate in his statement that "*Social Action* is the finest example of Christian social education at the present time?"

The challenge laid down by John Bennett between these covers is one which cannot be ignored. We accept it in principle without reservation; but can we accept it effectively and with applied courage? Gilbert Chesterton was asked once why he had accepted the Christian faith after so many years of searching for an answer to the questions of existence. His reply was characteristic both for its subtlety and for its profundity: "I am a Christian," he declared, "because I must have a faith which belongs to all the ages and to none." Here is given the final answer. We have a faith that began at the dawn of history and promises to go on until history is closed. It belonged to men in ancient times, it belongs to men in modern times, it will belong to men in all the times to come. Yet, it belongs ultimately to the eternal, to the cosmic, since it originates in the very nature of God. Our task is set before us with compelling certainty: We must make this faith the foundation of all present effort to be Christians, and all present striving for a transformed world. With all its limitations and mistakes, the Council for Social Action earnestly seeks to do this. And in so aspiring, we only seek to do our duty to mankind in this era of grief and glory, of revolution and rebirth, of utter tragedy and unshakeable hope.

SUGGESTED READING

John C. Bennett, *Social Salvation*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1935.

A constructive attempt to clear up existing confusion about the relation between the individual and changing social conditions.

Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, Macmillan, 1937.

This book is formidable but is probably the best systematic book on Christian Social Ethics.

V. A. Demant, *God, Man and Society*, Morehouse, 1934.

An Anglo-Catholic statement of "Christian Sociology."

C. Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*, Yale University Press, 1940.

A careful and authoritative history of the Social Gospel movement in America up to 1914.

F. Ernest Johnson, *The Church and Society*, Abingdon, 1935.

A very discriminating statement of the social function of the Church.

John Knox (Editor), *Religion and the Present Crisis*, University of Chicago Press, 1942.

An excellent symposium on many issues raised in "Enduring Bases of Christian Action."

Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Vol. I and II), Scribner's, 1940 and 1941.

Professor Niebuhr's most systematic work. Difficult but extremely important.

J. H. Oldham (Editor), *The Oxford Conference—Official Report*, Willett-Clark, 1937.

An important source for study of the subject of "Enduring Bases."

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Macmillan, 1909.

Probably the best of the books that represent the prophetic impulse behind the Social Gospel in America.

John A. Ryan, *Social Doctrine in Action*, Harper, 1941.

An autobiography of the outstanding Roman Catholic exponent of social action in America.

William Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, Penguin Books, 1942.

The clearest statement of the point of view of the Archbishop of Canterbury on social issues. The best book on this list to begin with.

Henry P. Van Dusen, *What is the Church Doing?* Scribner's, 1943.

A brief, up-to-date survey of the social action activities of the Church in both Europe and Asia.

Hugh Vernon White, *Christian Social Action*, Council for Social Action, 1937.

Official Report of the Malvern Conference, "Information Service," May 31, 1941.

SOME WORDS ABOUT STODDARD LANE

It would be unthinkable for SOCIAL ACTION to go to press this month without some word of tribute to Stoddard Lane who died in Des Moines on Monday, May 17, many years before his time.

He was one of the founders of the Council for Social Action and, for the first six years of its career, one of the chief influences in shaping its development. When his term as a member of the Council expired, he continued to support its work with marked courage and enthusiasm. In his own Church and in his state he put forth incessant effort in behalf of all the things for which the Council stands. He was known not only as a leading citizen of Des Moines, but as a leader in that city of civic enterprises looking toward the welfare of the common man.

When a man like Stoddard Lane is taken his place can never be filled. But those who come after him may gather inspiration from his example and, in their own way, carry on. This we shall all try to do. Such a man does not die. He only changes his manner and area of living. We who are still called to occupy this field and continue in this manner, take heart from his quenchless vitality and determine to do a better job along the same lines that he followed with such persistent faith.

(From "Advance," January 17, 1935: "There is a quite exciting Congregational Church in Des Moines, Plymouth by name, and presided over by one Stoddard Lane. Lane belongs to the no-fuss-and-feathers school of parsons. He moves around so quietly that one is led to believe that perhaps he has retired. But the rumor is premature I have it from some scores of excellent citizens around Des Moines that practically nothing ever happens in Des Moines, from the question of race relations or peace movements, to the moving of the town pump, in which Stoddard Lane does not have a hand.")